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DE RUEHBO #7746/01 3031747
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 301747Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9810
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7825
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 9478
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT 9009
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5562
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0762
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6201
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4149
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UNCLAS BOGOTA 007746

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FOR WHA/AND AND US/OAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS PROCEED SMOOTHLY WITH
MINIMAL VIOLENCE

SUMMARY

¶1. Colombia's October 28 local elections occurred without significant violence or problems. The GOC deployed 167,000 police and military to voting sites, and electoral officials were well-organized overall. The GOC quickly deployed security to the few areas where allegations of fraud--or localized violence --occurred. Elections centered on local issues and cross-party alliances, and the results do not represent a referendum on President Uribe or other national politicians. Candidates and parties associated with the para-political scandal lost ground--though a few questionable candidates won. Post will provide a complete analysis on the results and implications of key local results (including the para-political scandal) via septel. END SUMMARY.

OBSERVERS REPORT SMOOTH ELECTIONS

¶2. On October 29, OAS Electoral Observation Mission Chief Dante Caputo released a statement praising the GOC's election effort and concluding that elections proceeded smoothly -- with only isolated reports of election-day threats to candidates and voter intimidation. Caputo highlighted increased voter turnout, especially in rural areas, as an indication that "a violent minority could not manipulate elections through force." Voter turnout was high, with 10 departments reporting over 60% voter participation. The lowest voter participation rate was in Caqueta, where 47% of the eligible population voted. The OAS said the biggest problems were pre-election violence and threats against candidates, as well as vote-buying.

¶3. Embassy observers in ten critical departments (including: Norte de Santander, Sucre, Cordoba, Meta, Cesar, Valle del Cauca, Huila, Narino, and Caqueta) noted a strong and professional security presence, and confirmed only minimal incidents of violence and fraud. Electoral officials were well-organized, and only small problems with polling stations, many related to rainy weather, were reported. The GOC deployed 167,000 military and police to provide security at polling stations.

GOVERNORS RACES

¶4. The elections, which included over 86,000 candidates running for 18,527 offices (32 governors, 1,099 mayors, and department and town council slots) were largely decided on local issues and cross-party alliances; they were not considered a referendum on President Uribe. Still, the governing coalition did well, winning half of the governor's races. The U Party won seven governors slots in its first local election. The traditional Liberal Party won six governorships down from 13 in 2003, and the Conservatives won five, up from three in 2003. Control of governorships is key to parties' efforts to build or maintain national party structures.

BOGOTA AND OTHER KEY RACES

¶5. Leftist Polo Democratico Party candidate Samuel Moreno (born in Miami) won the Bogota mayor's race with 43 percent of the vote, defeating independent Enrique Penalosa. This is the second consecutive Polo victory in Bogota and gives the party a solid electoral base as it tries to build a national network. Alonso Salazar, who served in the hugely popular administration of Mayor Sergio Fajardo in Medellin, won an upset victory. In Cesar and Atlantico, independent candidates defeated heavily favored rivals connected to the former paramilitaries or traditional political elites. In general, parties associated with the para-political scandal lost ground--though candidates with ties to para-politicians

won in Cordoba and Sucre. Post will provide a complete analysis on key races and implications--including the para-political scandal--via septel.

SUCCESSFUL SECURITY MEASURES

¶6. Only isolated acts of violence marred the elections. Fighting between security forces and the FARC forced voting to be postponed in the small town of Argelia, Cauca department, and in Castilla de Nueva, Meta. In Cordoba, supporters of a losing candidate reportedly burned down the winner's home. On October 25, General Luis Alberto Perez, commander of the 13th Brigade in Bogota announced the arrest of seven FARC members in the Bogota neighborhood of San Cristobal who were allegedly planning elections-related attacks. The GOC implemented enhanced security measures before the elections including a ban on liquor sales, restrictions on motorcycles (frequently used in assassination attempts), and increased security at critical infrastructure targets.
Brownfield